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ABSTRACT

Suitable for classroom use, the handbook promotes public awareness of the need to provide more positive role models and fewer negative stereotypes on children's television. Each section contains photographic examples and quotations by members representing organizations such as Black Endowment Television, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Chicano Coalition of Los Angeles, The Gray Panthers, the National Council of Negro Women, and the National Black Media Coalition. The handbook presents research indicating that proportional representation of racial minorities, women, handicapped people, and the elderly in TV comedies and dramas has actually declined over the last decade despite the fact that minorities are the fastest growing segment in the population. A look at what is wrong with the way minorities are depicted on the screen extends into a discussion of stereotyping in advertising. Statistical evidence that minorities and women are underrepresented in the ownership and control of the media is presented. Examples of networks, programs, and alternative technologies are given which offer hope that children's television of the future will do a better job of putting diversity in programming. Affirmative action efforts to promote policies aimed at encouraging minority ownership of TV stations, and the hiring and advancement of women and minorities are noted. In addition, fourteen steps for changing the system and improving TV messages are outlined. (LH)

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PIGHTING TV STEREOTYPES. AN ACT HANDBOOK.

Action for Children's Television

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Action for Children's Television (ACT) is a national nonprofit child advocacy group working to encourage diversity in children's television and to eliminate commercial abuses targeted to children. ACT initiates legal reform and promotes public awareness of issues relating to children's television through public education campaigns, publications, national conferences, and speaking engagements. Founded in 1968, ACT has more than 20,000 members across the country and the support of major organizations concerned with children.

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Fighting TV Stereotypes An ACT Handbook

The "scalp-hunting Indian"...the "Mexican bandit"...the "crotchety old man"...the "buxom black mama"...the "inscrutable Oriental"...the "helpless female"...all images that are now part of a more prejudiced past, right? Wrong. Minorities and women have been protesting these tired stereotypes for years. Yet they're all still there in living color on the TV screen, teaching children lessons about the world that countless speeches about racial harmony and sexual equality could scarcely correct.

If television is a window on the world, it is the only window through which many children can see people who are different from themselves: people of other races, religions, or ethnic heritages, people with different accents. Yet most television, especially commercial TV, closes the window on diversity.

What kind of message is TV sending by leaving those who are "different" out of the picture? What does it teach the young Chicano if the Hispanic characters on television are most often criminals? Equally important, what does it teach the young white child about Hispanics—especially if he has no personal contact with them to help him form his own opinions?

Working to erase stereotypes and encourage positive role models on children's TV has long been a goal at Action for Children's Television (ACT). Three years after its inception in 1968, ACT commissioned the first of an ongoing series of studies of sex roles and racial and ethnic portrayals in children's programs and commercials. ACT has organized a number of workshops and symposia on TV role models, inviting producers, researchers, broadcasters, educators, advertisers, and public policy makers to examine the kinds of examples set on children's TV. And several ACT publications—*Promise and Performance: Children with Special Needs* and *TV & Teens* among them—have zeroed in on the problem of stereotyping. Many of the quotes in this handbook come from ACT's conferences and publications.

Television can provide more positive role models and fewer negative stereotypes. This handbook outlines how it could, and why it must.

ACT is grateful for the support of the Foundation for Character Education in making *Fighting TV Stereotypes* possible.

"Visions," a KCET-TV (Los Angeles) production, PBS

photo by Ronnie Phillips

Why ACT Is Concerned

When I was growing up watching television, there were only two black children on the screen—Buckwheat and Farina on "The Little Rascals." We didn't have the reinforcement of "Leave It to Beaver" or any of the other programs that showed warm family lives for young white kids.
—Robert L. Johnson, Black Entertainment Television

Television has come a long way since the days when "Amos and Andy" gave us some of the only black faces on the screen, when we dreamed of Jeannie and father knew best. Children today can watch shows like "Sesame Street," where little Cuban boys join hands with little Vietnamese girls to sing about numbers and ABCs. But there are more than enough programs—and commercials—on TV that counteract the effectiveness of such shows. Racial minorities, women, handicapped people, and the elderly are all underrepresented on children's television. If they are shown at all, they are too often portrayed in a stereotyped manner. What's more, a whole new generation is getting a skewed picture of the world from syndicated reruns and recycled movies that condone bigotry. And young people are spending 26 hours a week, on the average, in front of the TV, absorbing this cockeyed view.

How distorted is the TV picture? The children speak for themselves.

- "I think they are killers to Americans. Indians wear war paint." "Indians would be like us if they weren't dark, and they talk different. Sometimes they're like savages." —3rd and 4th graders
- "They're usually dopers, punks, and bums. I mean, they never show the ordinary average everyday Mexican teenager." — 16-year-old
- "I like to watch 'The Waltons' because I like to watch John Boy who is smart in school, he writes poetry, he tries hard to get his ideas across and he's going to college. I like to watch J.J. He's hip, he raps, he's funny, he gets bad grades in school." —teenage girl

At some point, the child is going to say, "Where do I fit into this society? The only time I see myself is when I make people laugh, or if there's a documentary about crime in the streets. But as far as seeing myself as a dress designer or a city official, it's just not there."
—Collette Wood, NAACP, Beverly Hills/Hollywood branch

Of course, television is not the only medium influencing children's perceptions of reality, and much of what young people watch is intended as fantasy. But children watch TV early and often, and from their viewing they take away a sense of the social order that colors their outlook on life.

Parents and teachers can help offset TV's twisted images, but opinions that are formed in early viewing years stay with children. As National Indian Youth Council Director Gerald Wilkinson observes, "Indian young people will act out not what their parents and grandparents say is Indian, but what the subtleties of TV dictate to be Indian."

By rarely treating girls and minorities with respect, television teaches them that they really don't matter. And it teaches children in the white mainstream that people who are "different" just don't count. Worse still, by exporting American programming abroad, we are shaping the way billions of people around the world see us—and the way they see themselves.

"Feeling Free," a Workshop on Children's Awareness production, PBS

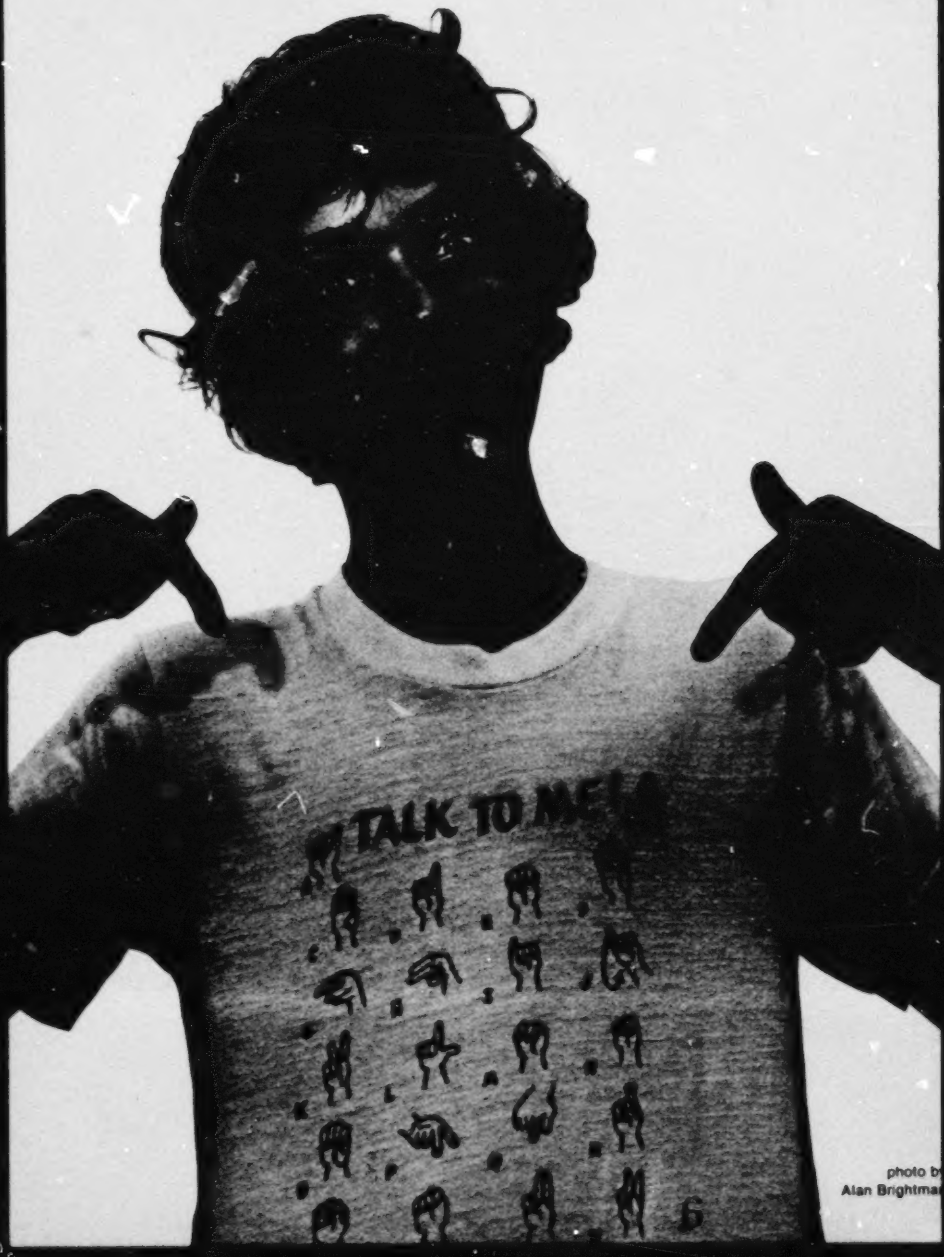


photo by
Alan Brightman

What the Research Says

Television, to be blunt about it, is basically a medium with a mind closed to the swiftly moving currents of tomorrow. The networks have erected an electronic wall around the status quo.
—*Jack Gould, former columnist,* The New York Times

All television is educational TV to young viewers, giving them an understanding of the way people should be treated. Young people are watching television at all hours of the day and night, not just during the Saturday morning cartoon blitz. Nielsen statistics reveal that children aged six to 11 do fully 30% of their TV viewing during so-called prime-time hours.

How does TV portray the elderly, racial minorities, and women? According to Michigan State University Professor Bradley S. Greenberg's *Life on Television,* the elderly are scarce on the small screen:

- Only 3% of all characters are in the 65-and-over group; a disproportionate number of these are male.

The 1982 National Institute of Mental Health report, *Television and Behavior,* reviewed a decade of research on television, finding:

- Men outnumber women 3 to 1. TV women are more passive and less achievement-oriented than men; some 70% of the women on TV do not hold jobs outside the home (this at a time when 53.1% of all American women have joined the labor force).
- Blacks and Hispanics are cast mainly in situation comedies, and even then only in a very few shows. Both groups are more likely to be portrayed as unemployed, or in unskilled jobs.

A 1981 study by Brigham Young University researchers showed that the proportional representation of minorities in TV comedies and dramas has actually *declined* over the last decade. Yet minorities are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population. Why are so many of them all but invisible on TV?

Came the revolution. And went the revolution. And Saturday morning children's programming on the three commercial networks is pretty much back at ground zero, improved only by a few hard-won cosmetic changes.
—*Tom Shales, TV critic,* The Washington Post

If prime-time TV slights women and minorities, children's television offers an even more slanted view of society. In *Representations of Life on Children's Television*, Boston University Professor F. Earle Barcus concluded that in commercial programming specifically designed for children there are fewer minorities and females, and more stereotypes about them, than in adult television. The Barcus study, conducted for ACT in 1981, found that:

- Out of a total of 1145 characters in the programs studied, only 22% were female. They were portrayed as younger, more dependent, and less active than males.
- Only 3.7% of all characters were black, 3.1% were Hispanic, and 0.8% were Asian; one American Indian appeared. (By contrast, the latest census counted 11.7% blacks, 6.4% Hispanics, 1.5% Asians, and 0.6% Native Americans among 226.5 million Americans.)
- Of all characters with speaking parts, 57.5% were white, and 33.8% were animals, robots, or other non-humans.

When an animal is more likely than a black to have a speaking role, it's time to take a closer look at the television our children are watching.

"Hot Fudge," a WXYZ-TV (Detroit) production, syndicated by Lexington Broadcast Services

What's Wrong with these Pictures?

In parts of the country where there are few Chicanos, people see "Chico and the Man" and think this is what we are really like. In one of the first episodes, the man says to Chico, "Why don't you go back to Mexico and take your flies with you?" I know they are trying to show prejudice, but at the same time there are people sitting at home thinking, "Yeah, they ought to go back to Mexico and take their flies with them."
—Dan Chavez, Chicano Coalition of Los Angeles

National Urban League Director Whitney Young once cited a scene on network television that epitomizes TV's exclusion of blacks. "I don't know how many of you know 125th Street in Harlem," Young said, "but it takes real genius to shoot a scene from 125th Street in Harlem and have nothing but white people in it."

An isolated case of TV's failure to bring minorities into the picture? It hardly seems so. For unless they are specifically written into a script, minorities are unlikely to appear onscreen. But fair representation on TV isn't just a matter of counting black vs. white characters. It's also a question of *how* minorities and women are portrayed—as the butt of jokes or as useful human beings, in segregated groups or as an integral part of society, in lead roles or as subservient sidekicks.

Producers of films and TV that blatantly parade stereotypes have defended their creations by saying that white people are depicted in degrading situations also. That's true, but for every bad white image, there are ten good ones to shift the balance. Whereas a single caricature of a white person is accepted as an exaggerated truth, a stereotype is accepted as the whole and complete truth about all Asians.
—Filmmaker Irvin Paik

To show all minorities or women as perfect, saintly characters would be as much a disservice to children as to paint them as all bad. But when the same characteristics are attributed over and over again to any group—gays, the elderly, the handicapped—TV is reinforcing stereotypes:

- The black players on a cartoon basketball team get lost in the jungle and can't figure out an escape route . . . until they are saved by their white manager. A crucial match begins, and the white rivals are slaughtering the black team. It's clear the white team is cheating, but it takes a dog to set things straight for a black team victory.
- Her body bionically reconstructed, the pretty heroine returns to her home town and decides to give up tennis and become a teacher. Still, she puts her superhuman skills to good use around the house: scrubbing floors, vacuuming, and washing windows.
- Six Arab assassins are the quarry of the three beautiful detectives. As the evil Arabs plot to kill scores of innocent people, they leer at a belly dancer and shovel food into their mouths with their hands. When the scheme fails and the Arabs are apprehended, one of their captors sneers, "You ain't so tough . . . you camel eaters!"

Weeding out stereotypes can be tough, especially since there's a danger that even images meant as positive can, with overuse, themselves become stereotypes. The granny on a motorcycle, the supermom/brainy executive, the Asian computer whiz—these generalizations are also misleading. Replacing old stereotypes with new clichés is no remedy.

"The Steeler and the Pittsburgh Kid," a Jenner-Wallach production in association with Comworld Productions, NBC Project Peacock

What about the Ads?

Whether we like it or not, television influences the thinking of children. We know we cannot initiate a national karate attack on the tube. We therefore must wage an intensive effort to improve significantly television's portrayal of minority-group experiences in this country.
—Professor Charles W. Cheng, UCLA Graduate School of Education & Marsha Hirano-Nakanishi, Institute for Responsive Education

Ideally, there should be no advertising on children's television. Young people simply are not sophisticated enough viewers to be able to separate fact from advertising fiction. But as long as ads do appear on commercial children's television, an effort should at least be made to avoid perpetuating stereotypes. Children see nine and a half minutes of commercials for each Saturday morning cartoon hour, and more than 25,000 30-second messages a year, the impact of which can hardly be dismissed.

Marketing surveys have at last begun to convince advertisers of the wisdom of appealing to minority audiences. As a result, children are likely to see more minorities *between* the programs than *on* them. Money talks; advertisers have listened. Still, the commercials have a long way to go.

The stereotypes are very much with us. . . . Old people are still constipated, can't sleep, their dentures don't stick, and they're experts on remedies for aches and pains.
—Eva Skinner, National Media Watch Committee, Gray Panthers

In the world of commercials, boys play with toy trucks and racing cars. Girls play with makeup, dolls, and miniature household appliances. Moms offer snacks to the gang; dads get out and toss the football around. If women have careers at all, they're mere diversions from their kitchens and their men: "I can bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan, and never let you forget you're a man . . . 'cause I'm a woman."

How constructive are these advertising stereotypes?

- Demonstrating the ease of operating the family's new dishwasher, the little girl says to her male friend, "See how hard I work for you!"
- The modern-day stereotypical Chinese launderer no longer says, "No tickee, no washee." Instead he tries to convince his customers that an "ancient Chinese secret" is the reason for their clothes' brightness . . . as his wife stands knowingly in the background, holding a box of water softener.

Sexism, racism, and ageism emerge in more subtle ways, as well. Women may be on camera, displaying the product, but the voice of authority convincing consumers to buy it is usually male—90.6% of the time, according to one Screen Actors Guild study. Blacks are given fewer speaking roles than whites, and they are usually the ones being instructed—more often than not by a white man—in the right product to buy. Moreover, a 1981 Amherst College study points out that most "integrated" ads are simply spliced-together scenes of separate black groups and white groups.

Even public service announcements can have underlying messages. Harvard University's Dr. Chester Pierce cites a PSA that subtly underscores the image of blacks as immature, less serious. A group of schoolchildren recite the virtues of eye examinations: they help you read more, they can help you improve your grades. When it's the black girl's turn, she announces that eye tests are "fun." On its own, a harmless statement; combined with other TV stereotypes, not so innocuous.

"The Year of the Dragon," a Young People's Special, produced and syndicated by Multimedia Program Productions

Who Runs the Show?

The world of telecommunications continues to be predominantly white, as reflected by ownership and control of the media as well as in the programming content. . . . The failure of television to reflect the racial, cultural, and ethnic pluralism and diversity that characterizes this country today is a tragic loss.
—Merble Harrington-Reagon, National Council of Negro Women

The TV industry points to its hiring record with pride: FCC statistics released in 1982 show that women made up 34.7% of all employees in broadcast TV and 34.4% in cable. Minorities held 16.9% of all jobs in broadcast TV and 13.9% in cable.

Yet a closer look at the makeup of the TV labor force reveals that women and minorities are rarely seen where it counts: in the boardroom. They are, to use the U.S. Civil Rights Commission's term, mere window dressing on the set. Office and clerical duties are still considered women's work, with women holding 85.8% of all such jobs in commercial and public television, and 91.6% in cable. And while the FCC puts the number of broadcast "officials and managers" at 9.1% minority and 26.8% female, these figures mask the true picture about who makes the decisions in the television industry. For included in this top category are not just general managers and program directors—who tend to be white males—but also many of those with no real say in station policy, such as promotion directors and research directors (who are often minorities or females).

This employment imbalance is perhaps a natural consequence of the pattern of ownership of TV stations across the country:

- Of the 1042 broadcast stations operating in the U.S., only 18 are minority-owned.
- A 1982 survey of 288 broadcast stations found that women were principal owners of only eight.
- Only 20 cable companies, representing 45 to 50 of the country's 4,700 cable franchises, are minority-owned.

Television . . . has a responsibility—and a need—to find those potential Lonne Elders and Alex Haleys, to discover tomorrow's Lorraine Hansberrys.
—TV writer Len Riley

Minorities and women are even more scarce at the creative end of the TV structure. Research by the Black Anti-Defamation Coalition reveals that the average black TV viewer assumes that any show with a largely black cast is written, directed, and produced by blacks, and that blacks are reaping the profits. That is hardly ever the case. In 1980, the Writers Guild of America, West reported 1,540 members working on a weekly basis in TV. How many were black? Four.

For the most part, the TV business runs on the buddy system, making it difficult for those without contacts in the "old boy network" to get a foot in the door. Some who have broken through the formidable barriers complain that they aren't given creative control, that established white writers are called in after minorities submit story ideas.

That is not to say that no one but a Native American can write about the Indian experience, or that only the elderly should produce programs focusing on aging. But the more input minorities and women have, the more accurate TV's view of the world will become—not just in entertainment, but in the news, where what gets reported, and how, is often determined by people who lack sensitivity to minority issues.

"Freestyle," a KCET-TV (Los Angeles) production, PBS

The PBS Alternative

You can't turn the world around in a half-hour TV series. But you can make it more difficult for children to maintain stereotypic notions. Once you've been exposed to a variety of people within a group, it's hard to continue saying, "They're all alike."
—Yanna Kroyt Brandt, executive producer, "Vegetable Soup"

When television is good, it can be very, very good, encouraging racial equality, presenting women in leadership roles, showing gays, the elderly, and handicapped people as valuable members of society.

The Public Broadcasting Service has consistently led the way in fostering positive role models for children. While programming on public TV has its faults, and minorities and women are still underrepresented both onscreen and behind the scenes, PBS has come closest to television's most noble goal: serving the public interest. Few who compare programs like those noted below with those on the commercial networks could quibble with the conclusion of the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Public Broadcasting: "Public television is capable of becoming the clearest expression of American diversity and of excellence within diversity."

- Children with handicaps and those without have both profited from positive images of the disabled in shows like "Feeling Free" and Mister Rogers's "I Am, I Can, I Will" series. PBS's "Rainbow's End" was a pioneering effort to teach basic reading and language skills to hearing-impaired youth.
- "The Righteous Apples," a "sitcom with a message," takes on sensitive topics like racial violence without suggesting that such issues can be resolved in the space of a half hour.
- "Freestyle," focusing on changing roles of women and men, emphasized nontraditional careers for both sexes and explored the consequences of stereotypical thinking.

PBS also deserves praise as a major showcase for the many series produced under the Emergency School Assistance Act (ESAA) TV project, a federally financed program to combat racism. Although the ESAA project is no longer in effect, the series are still being aired, and the National Captioning Institute is adding closed captions for the hearing-impaired, making them even more valuable. Some examples:

- "Bean Sprouts" illustrates the unique challenges of growing up in San Francisco's Chinatown through the eyes of an immigrant boy.
- Teenagers in a strong and supportive middle-class black family learn difficult lessons about responsibility and independence in "Up and Coming."
- "Carrascolendas" and "Villa Allegre" entertain in two languages through music, comedy, and dance.
- School desegregation is discussed by those it most affects in "As We See It," a series researched and written by high schoolers.

Girls and boys of all backgrounds have benefited from PBS's commitment to cultural diversity. Unfortunately, federal funds, crucial in keeping public television alive, have been slashed. And the administration threatens to cut government support even further. So the outlook for continued excellence in public television programming for children is cloudy indeed.

"The New Fat Albert Show," a Filmation Studios production, CBS

More Bright Spots

When programming—along with employment—at least achieves the same parity in diversity as is reflected in the total population, we will have reached the best of all possible worlds: a situation which argues for no special attention to minority programming. That time, unfortunately, is somewhere in the future.
—Janet Dewart, former director of Specialized Audience Programs, National Public Radio

Public television isn't the only place where positive minority images may be found, nor should PBS be solely responsible for all socially relevant programming. From time to time programs appear on commercial television that do more than just line corporate coffers. When they appear, they stand out:

- "The New Fat Albert Show" on CBS gets out important messages about issues like anti-Semitism.
- NBC's "Fame" shows teens of varied ethnic backgrounds performing and studying together and working out their differences.
- A nutrition spot called "Beans and Rice" and a series of brief lessons in urban self-reliance called "Willie Survive" are two commendable public service efforts that appear in ABC's Saturday morning lineup.
- A number of national children's specials have confronted minority issues sensitively. ABC's Afterschool Specials, which are closed captioned, have focused on racial strife ("The Color of Friendship"), blindness ("Blind Sunday"), and other serious themes. Notable syndicated specials include "Joshua's Confusion," from Multimedia, contrasting old ways with new through the eyes of an Amish boy, and "Loser Take All," from Capital Cities, about competition between two youths, one white, one Chicano.
- In the mid-'70s "Yut, Yee, Sahm, Here We Come" became the first locally produced bilingual series. Produced by San Francisco's Chinese community and aired on KPIX-TV, it introduced children to the positive aspects of bicultural community life.

You shouldn't put diversity on television because it's right . . . you should put it on because it's good business. People want to see themselves, to see the people around them on television. They want television to broaden their world.
—Actor LeVar Burton

Commercial broadcasters defend their programming decisions by maintaining that they must serve too broad an audience to cater to special interest groups. But good programming cuts across all boundaries—color, sex, and ethnicity. After all, it's not only doctors who watch programs with a hospital theme. TV viewers of all backgrounds will tune in to well-made shows that focus on minorities or that showcase minority talent.

Occasional specials about race relations or feminism or elderly rights are fine, but they're simply not enough. Children need to watch news that better represents minority concerns, cartoons that reflect all the colors of the human rainbow, and live-action programs that enhance their lives. What's needed is a commitment to diversity in TV programming on a *regular* basis—locally as well as nationally—and to the time it takes for such programming to build an audience.

"My Father Sun-Sun Johnson," a Learning Corporation of America/British Broadcasting Corporation co-production, Calliope

Other Technologies

There are a lot of opportunities for minorities to take part in cable, low-power television . . ., and other technologies, if people know and work hard for them. The powers that be are not going to give them away.
—Will Horton, Minorities in Cable and New Technologies

With cable TV getting off the ground, there is reason to hope that children's television of the future will do a better job of putting diversity into programming. That won't happen if cable sticks to the same old formulas that dictate programming to the lowest common denominator. But there are signs of progress, like these cable initiatives:

- SIN National Spanish Television Network and Spanish Universal Television (SUN) are two national services directed to the Spanish-speaking audience, both with special children's programming.
- A number of other national cable services either existing or in the works are directed to specific minority audiences. The Silent Network, for the hearing-impaired, will carry original programming for children and teens. Black Entertainment Television offers a weekly family hour, interviews with leading black personalities, and a live telephone call-in show for teens.
- Programs produced locally, either by cable stations or by citizens taking advantage of public access provisions, make for TV that truly reflects community interests and needs. College students in East Lansing, Michigan, produce "Black Notes," while nine- to 12-year-old students in Hackensack, New Jersey, discuss Black History Month and other topics on the "8:40 Report."

Although they can provide disenfranchised groups with more access to the medium, it's unlikely that alternative technologies will solve TV's ills. For one thing, cable can be costly. Video discs and video cassettes, while increasing viewing options by allowing families and schools to program their own TV fare, involve expensive equipment. If much of the audience for minority programs cannot afford to bring the new technologies into the home, their potential for alleviating TV's distortion of life will be limited.

Since that is so, low-power television may eventually prove to be one service through which minorities can have considerable impact. As many as 4,000 new TV stations are expected to be set up, with the ability to transmit signals within a 15-mile radius instead of the 50 miles or more covered by full-power stations. Low-power stations can be built for a fraction of the cost of acquiring conventional TV stations, and the Federal Communications Commission plans to give preference to minority applicants for ownership, paving the way for neighborhood programming.

Although low–power TV is still in its infancy, there is another alternative to commercial children's television, and it's one already found in nearly every home: radio. Recently, a number of significant radio series have been aired nationally:

- Black music is put in historical perspective in "From Jumpstreet," and the concerns of Latino youths are discussed in the bilingual "Checking It Out," two public TV shows now on radio.
- The contributions of minority figures in history who "changed adversity to achievement" are examined in "Turnaround," produced for teens by the New York State Education Department.
- "Listen Here," a series of 60-second public service announcements targeted to the secondary school level, profiles successful "famous and not-so-famous people of color."

"The Color of Friendship," a Highgate Pictures production,
ABC Afterschool Special

Affirmative Action

Why is black ownership so tremendously important? . . . We need to control airwaves in order to control the images of black people in the media.
—Pluria Marshall, National Black Media Coalition

In 1978 the Federal Communications Commission adopted policies aimed at encouraging minority ownership of TV stations by extending tax benefits to minority entrepreneurs and making it easier for them to buy into television. Still, the number one obstacle for minority groups seeking to purchase TV stations remains financing. Several funds have been set up to ease the way, such as the National Association of Broadcasters' Broadcast Capital Fund and Syndicated Communications, a minority-run venture capital company.

With more ethnics and women in ownership positions, there's a better chance for diversity to be reflected in TV programming. Detroit's WGPR-TV, which became the nation's first black-owned station in 1975, allocates large amounts of time to ethnic programming. And a new Bridgeport, Connecticut, station "organized, controlled, and managed by women" plans to air children's programs that will "demand active responses from viewers—children, parents, grandparents."

It is important to move ahead with our commitment to equal employment opportunities—not simply to create more jobs for minorities, but to create more sensitivity in broadcasting to the diversity of peoples and lifestyles that defines the American idiom.
—Charles Ferris, ex-chairman, Federal Communications Commission

Filling the ranks of the television industry, from owners down, with a multitude of perspectives can only broaden TV's view of the world . . . for children, for everyone.

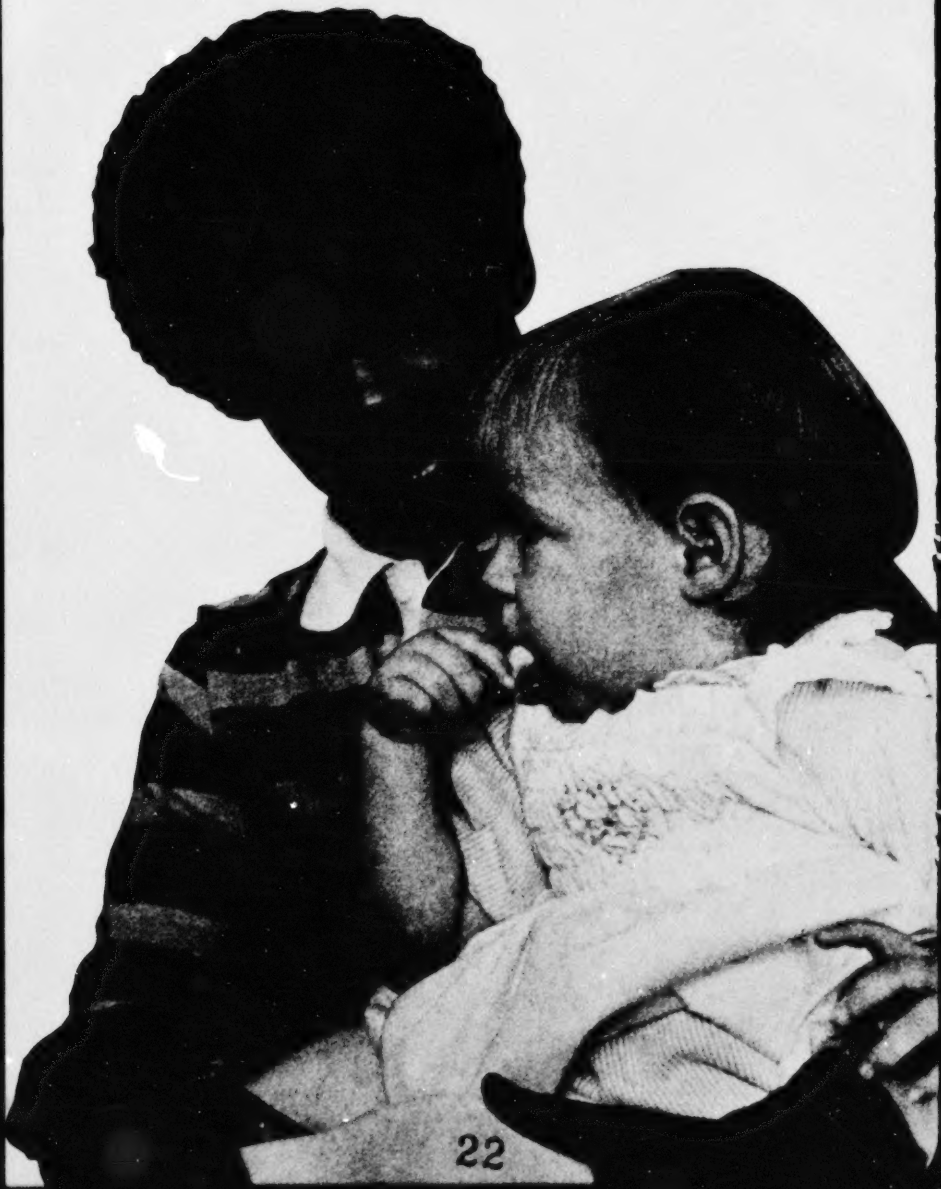
WNYC-TV is a good example of the increased sensitivity to community needs that can result from hiring minorities to decision-making positions. In 1981 the New York station appointed a black manager; since then, the percentage of black-oriented programming has risen to 30%—more black TV fare than any other station in the country.

Slow though it may be, progress has been made throughout the industry. Much of that progress is a result of Equal Employment Opportunity requirements set out by the FCC for all licensees. Any station with five or more employees is required to file annual reports of hiring practices with the FCC, and to establish policies that will ensure "equal opportunity in every aspect of station employment."

These provisions have served as an opening for groups like the Latino Committee on the Media and the National Organization for Women to challenge the renewal of broadcast licenses, one means of reminding local broadcasters of their obligation to serve the public interest.

From time to time there have been signs that the FCC wants to pull back on its commitment to EEO. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Clay Smith, Jr., emphasizes that such a move would be a giant step backwards. "To refuse to enforce FCC policies in connection with EEO would reverse 15 years of gains made by minorities and women in telecommunications," he says. Without regulations that promote the hiring and advancement of women and minorities, the chance for their voices to be heard in making programming decisions would be slighter than ever.

"Oh, Boy! Babies!," a Laughing Willow Company production,
NBC Special Treat



Changing the System

We are an unfinished item on America's agenda. It is our task to involve and engage ourselves in the struggle to force our country to recognize its best potential.
—Actor Ossie Davis

Minorities and women who have made it into television know how hard it can be to scale the walls that insulate the industry. To help others make their way, they have banded together to set up new "old boy networks":

- The National Black Media Coalition runs a media clearinghouse and an EEO resource center, and counsels minority media investors.
- Minorities in Cable and New Technologies holds workshops to increase minority participation in alternative technologies.

Impetus for change has come from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting as well:

- The National Black Programming Consortium sponsors an annual competition—with a Children's/Teen category—for notable TV programs and films reflecting black concerns.
- The National Asian American Telecommunications Association produces radio and TV series and serves as a clearinghouse for information about Asian media professionals.
- Public TV and radio stations controlled by women and minorities are eligible for CPB grants, as are female and minority public TV employees wishing to upgrade their skills.

It's not only national organizations that can effect change; a lot can be done on the local level. WETA-TV in Washington, D.C., for example, has provided solid training through its minority internship and minority film laboratory projects. Broadcasters can watch out for stereotypes on network-fed programs and choose to air alternative material. Local broadcasters and cablecasters can promote positive images by turning to unexplored sources for programming ideas: African poetry, Italian folk tales, local ethnic festivals. And media employees can let the community, and the press, know of obstacles they meet in getting balance and accuracy into local programming.

If we want our children to grow up without the prejudice that has stained so many of our generation, and we want the educational achievement of our children to be as great as possible, then why have we ignored the inexpensive chance to reach children over television?
—Former Vice President Walter Mondale

There are many ways we all can work toward more and better portrayals of minorities and women on children's television. Getting involved in the cable franchising process is one step—making sure that cable systems provide programming for, and by, young people and minority and women's groups. Businesses can underwrite programming for local broadcast or cablecast that aims at erasing stereotypes, and companies can pool their resources to set up job training or scholarship programs.

Viewers can talk back to the TV industry. Protests can be effective; praise is equally important. Parents, educators, religious groups, and youth groups can encourage children to question TV's view of the world.

The TV industry can't know how viewers feel if the lines of communication are closed. Opening them up, and speaking out about television's portrayal of women and minorities, is not only our right. It's our responsibility to our children, and to their future.

Fighting TV Stereotypes An Action Guide

For children, seeing is believing. How can we improve TV's messages?

The TV industry can:

- Increase diversity in programming of all kinds. Children need to see characters who just happen to be black or Hispanic, as well as dramas and documentaries that focus on racial issues.
- Hire and promote minorities and women, especially to decision-making positions.
- Establish recruitment and training programs and scholarships to open the doors in all branches of the field: writing, production, news reporting, management.
- Actively solicit programming ideas, scripts, and onscreen talent that reflect America's multiethnic, multicultural nature.
- Provide access to community groups to ensure a minority voice on cable, low-power, and local broadcast TV.

The business community can:

- Underwrite children's programs that reflect the interests and showcase the talents of minorities and women.
- Support public television as a valuable TV alternative.
- Fund education and promotion campaigns to develop new audiences and encourage community involvement.
- Pool resources to sponsor scholarships and recruitment and training programs to give the handicapped, women, and minorities a start in television.
- Help finance minority ownership of broadcast, cable, and low-power stations and other TV technologies.

All of us can:

- Watch TV with our children and talk about the role models and stereotypes television provides.
- React to what children see on the screen. Call, visit, or write to station managers, producers, writers, and advertisers to applaud, criticize, or suggest new ideas. Encourage children to speak out as well.
- Become involved with cable in the community. Get in on the negotiations to make sure that children are served and that programming reflects local ethnic flavor and minority-group concerns. Urge young people to take advantage of the chance to make their own programming for public access channels.
- Support policies at the local, state, and national levels that ensure fair representation for women, handicapped, the elderly, and racial and ethnic groups—in television and in society at large.

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